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BRAZIL: HITTING THE COMMUNISTS

A recent crackdown on the Communist Party represents President Geisel's response to military hard liners who have been dissatisfied with what they perceive as his laxness in security matters. At the same time, Geisel may be using the opportunity to centralize his authority over internal security organizations and to warn those who take undue advantage of his modest liberalization efforts.

Justice Minister Falcao, in a televised address, highlighted the recent capture of a number of members of the illegal Brazilian Communist Party and the seizure of printing presses used to produce the party's newspaper. Falcao urged all Brazilians to familiarize themselves with the details of the government's action, which are being published.

Although the Moscow-oriented party has long been docile, the government at times moves to suppress it still further. By playing up its actions against the Communists, the government is going out of its way to praise the security forces. This, in turn, is meant to reassure hard liners that security interests are still receiving high priority. Several leading military conservatives recently have expressed concern that security

consciousness has been declining under Geisel. This, they feel, led to the opposition electoral gains last November and could encourage extremists.

The US embassy reports press speculation that the justice minister's prominent role in announcing the arrests signals the government's intention to centralize the administration of security matters. Until now, such problems have been primarily the domain of the armed services. A desire to centralize control of the many security organizations would be consistent with Geisel's operating style in other areas. Moreover, such a move would enable Brasilia to correct abuses of operational authority by regional commanders now operating with virtual autonomy.

Finally, Falcao's statement that the recent raids turned up information proving the party's "participation" in the elections could be designed as a warning to any congressman-elect contemplating some provocative or controversial action—particularly when congress convenes in March. The same claim might also be used at some future time to buttress the government's case should it opt to remove a politician deemed unacceptable.

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Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2012/05/30 : CIA-RDP06T01849R000100030079-6

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